REMARKS ABOUT THE REOPENING OF THE RESTORED SANCTUARY

JOHN M. BUCHANAN, PASTOR

FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO
DECEMBER 4, 1994

We Presbyterians, sons and daughters of John Calvin, are very reserved people as we worship. In the presence of God we are inclined to act like school children on the first day of class, afraid to make a false move, say a word, even turn our heads. I had the privilege of worshiping in the congregation on Thanksgiving Day at Quigley Seminary Chapel. It is a wonderful space. When you sit in the pews you look at a beautifully carved altar, candles, pretty flowers. But behind you as you sit, is the chapel's most glorious possession, a magnificent rose window. In order to see it during worship you have to do something very un-Presbyterian, turn completely around in your pew, look up, which is what I did on Thanksgiving Day, and in the process, look right into the eyes of all the people behind you, staring straight ahead. And even if they don't mean it, all those eyes looking one way and yours the other, inevitably causes the gawker to feel, at the very least, inappropriate. So, after no more than a fraction of a second glimpse of the rose window I returned to my original position, continued to stare straight ahead and could almost hear my mother say, "That's better."

I hope you've been sneaking a look around every now and then. Let's all look now — at the chancel woodwork, the handsome pulpit canopy, all cleaned and repaired and refinished. The new organ case in the south balcony, and new pipes. The beautiful pews and refinished balcony facing woodwork. The new pew back speakers and refinished floors. And do turn around and look at our bright east window which will be magnificently lighted from the inside and the carvings on the balcony and narthex screen wall. Pay special attention to the narthex ceiling as you leave.

Look up at the newly reconfigured chandeliers, and the ceiling, lighted, for the first time. Gothic architecture was not intended for preaching. The height and hard surfaces cause reverberations that preachers hate and musicians love. Before the development of sophisticated audio-acoustical equipment, the only way to make space like this listener friendly was to retard the reverberation by installing sound-absorbing materials which is what the builders of this sanctuary did. The ceiling was covered with three inch panels of horsehair and burlap. It worked. Preachers loved it: musicians hated it.

Today we have a new ceiling — or a Gothic ceiling as Ralph Adams Cram intended it. Oak panels have replaced the horsehair; the acoustics are much improved. Our new sound system will help you hear me and our new ceiling will help you hear Dr. Simmons and the choir. It is not true that it is the Morgan F. Simmons Memorial Ceiling but it is true that we are proud and gratified to have resolved an eighty-year-old dilemma. And that preachers and musicians ever after us will live in peace and harmony. And speaking of Dr. Simmons, do come see the beautiful needlepoint cushions on the lower chancel chairs which he has crafted so lovingly and given to us.

And, of course, our angels — fourteen of them, cleaned and touched up and now lighted — standing over our heads every Sunday, praising God in the sanctuary praising with trumpet, lute and harp, strings, pipes and clanging symbols.

Some of us were privileged to be in the sanctuary as the work of restoration proceeded. It was thrilling and inspiring to witness first-hand the devotion of the workers, to talk to the men and women who cleaned and refinished and repaired and restored. I made a point of doing it: talked to the man who was restoring the facing on the balcony and who was good enough to explain what he was doing and to share his inspiration at the work of the original wood carver who had fashioned the rosette medallions. And the artists from San Francisco who restored the canvas panels in the vaults, working at the top of the vaults on a hot summer day when it was ninety outside and hotter inside and thick dust was in the air. And the window workers who showed me where a former stained glass worker had made a mistake and installed a particular cut of glass upside down, several times. The two of them, I recall, were very proud of their discovery and the opportunity to make it right. And even though you and I would never have noticed or known there was anything wrong, we do know now that it is the way it is supposed to be. And the foreman of the stone cleaners and the painters ... It is not true that the crafts have died out, or that workers no longer are proud of fine, careful work.

We will recognize them personally in a worship service on Sunday, January 22, but I wanted you to think about them today and to include their labor in the gratitude which we are experiencing and expressing.

You will have an opportunity to greet the restoration architect, Mary DiNadai, at the reception. Mary is a partner at the firm of John Milner Associates, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. She has literally lived with this project for six months. She has done careful research; she has held to the highest standards; she has guided us every step of the way. She has been a wonderful professional whom we have come to respect and love. Mary please stand. Now, having been very un-Presbyterian by turning around and looking all about, I think we ought to throw all caution and reserve to the wind and thank Mary and everyone involved in this project by applauding.

Elam and Grace Davies, who served this church faithfully and well from 1961 until 1984, called yesterday to offer congratulations and best wishes.

Roger Kennedy, Director of the Museum of American History of the Smithsonian, has written and published a wonderful book, *American Churches*.

In the introduction he observes that

> "History was set upon a new direction and the religious life of billions of people was profoundly affected by the birth of a child in an animal shed." Kennedy points out, in the introduction, the internal tension within Christianity. "Why," he asks, "is a monumental building desirable to the practice of Christianity, the humblest of faiths."

It is, of course, a question asked as long ago as the time of Solomon, whose grand temple, some thought, was more an expression of Solomon's ego than God's glory.

Roger Kennedy offers a response by the building committee of a church in Columbus, Indiana, the Tabernacle Church of Christ, which had retained Eliel & Eero Saarinen as architects.

The committee said:

> "A costly church can be justified, in our opinion, only so far as it inspires and stimulates people in living better lives ...
>
> "Great buildings dominate and influence the lives of all who live near them. A church which embodies and illustrates the truths of Christianity should be a monument in which the affection and aspiration of many generations of Christians are centered. That is why we chose to spend our money in this way. We want our labor, in the form of the building, to continue to influence the lives of our children and of theirs, to remind those who pass of Christ and to renew his spirit among us."

Our re-creation and restoration project will continue for at least another six months. The sanctuary restoration is only 25 percent of the total job. When the project is completed, we will have invested our resources and love and faith in a building, not a monument, but a visible, tangible, useful, functional, accessible embodiment of the spirit of Jesus Christ.

I thank one and all for coming this far. I encourage all of us to stay the course, to finish the race, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who is, and will always be, the head of the Church, which is his body.